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S.O.S.

Pants fall; video of incident stirs debate on airing footage

By HOWARD KURTZ

Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Don Imus wanted to run the footage but couldn't get permission from his bosses at MSNBC.

Fox News Channel aired the footage as an example of life's embarrassing moments.

CNN refused to carry the footage on grounds of taste.

C-SPAN edited out the footage — which it now says was a mistake.

The videotape that many Washington journalists were anguishing over Wednesday involved the receiving line at Tuesday night's state dinner for South Korean President Kim Dae Jung. A renowned video artist, Nam June Paik, left his wheelchair, grabbed his walker and was shaking hands with President Clinton when his pants suddenly dropped to his ankles.

The embarrassing moment — compounded by the artist's lack of underwear — lasted more than 10 seconds until another Korean came to his aid. Clinton's expression did not change.

Fox resolved the question — to air or not to air — in the affirmative.

"We digitized his face and private parts in order not to embarrass him," said Dennis Murray, executive producer of Fox News Channel, which used the footage on its "X-Press" morning show. "It was a jumping-off point for a discussion about your most embarrassing moments . . . We really went out of our way not to be tasteless."

But network executives later discussed the matter with Fox News President Roger Ailes, who said he was disappointed with the decision and would not have run the footage because it provided a laugh at a disabled person's expense.

Imus joked about the incident through much of his radio show, which is simulcast on MSNBC. "It doesn't get any better than this," he said. But his MSNBC producer refused to air the videotape.

Said Frank Sesno, CNN's Washington bureau chief: "This

fellow apparently is the victim of a stroke. What happened to him is unfortunate and it serves no editorial purpose, other than voyeurism, to put that on television."

C-SPAN did not carry the state dinner live because Congress was still in session, but aired selected portions of the receiving line — not including the incident — at 3 a.m. "In retrospect, we should have aired the whole thing," said spokesman Rich Fahle. "It's not C-SPAN's style to edit anything. . . . A decision was made to protect this person, and that's not what C-SPAN is around to do."

A Washington Post story in Wednesday's Style section mentioned the incident in the second paragraph — "a disabled guest accidentally dropping his pants in the receiving line" — and provided further detail on an inside page.

"Confronted with a difficult deadline decision, the editors and reporters involved in this story made a choice that we regret," said Robert G. Kaiser, the Post's managing editor. He said the second paragraph "was utterly lacking in context or explanation," but that the later passage, "recording that this unusual thing occurred, explaining why it occurred and how, is absolutely appropriate. It's a freakish event . . . and a lot of important people saw it, and it should be noted."

The Post received several calls of complaint. But Jim Dickson, director of community affairs for the National Organization on Disability, did not fault the newspaper's coverage.

"Embarrassments happen any time you're in public life," he said. "But if anyone's pants fall down while shaking hands with the president, I can't imagine The Post not covering it. And I don't think we want special treatment as a disabled group."

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ROBERT MORTON

Brow Nudes

ROBERT MORTON, whom ALAN LETTERMAN ousted as executive producer in on three pieces at York Academy of Fine Home a Nude" action — and not one Al Hirschfeld show-up in the fully Mr. Letterman's up- Morton bid on "My JULIAN SCHNABEL, graph of a hot dog "Achievement," D RUSCHA silk- with the inscription, "ow the Old Story," going to put it in my cause — work with ill day, said Mr. who starts filming GUY ZAMO's "Freak"

"...to life, you might say," Ms. Toll says. "In my art I was able to separate. It was my escape to a better world. I would turn every negative into a positive. If the peasants were hateful, in my pictures they were wonderful. I had scarlet fever; all my mother could do was put cold compresses on my head. In my paintings when a little girl is sick, a doctor comes to see her and she is visited by friends."

Where does the trick come from that enables one to do a reverse print of reality, throwing up pretty watercolors in yellows and reds when you are living in the colors of genocide and war?

Ms. Toll painted 64 watercolors in the 13 months she and her mother were in hiding. (Six will be auctioned at Sotheby's next Friday.) All show scenes of a happy childhood.

Ms. Toll, who favors dangling earrings and has an accent evocative of borscht, is a welcoming, exuberant sort.

"I feel like I know you a million years," she says a little while after meeting, which actually is how people feel meeting her. An hour into lunch, understanding there is no need to ask, Ms. Toll has moved on to the

war to scenes of seeming normalcy, Ms. Toll believes was the gift of her mother, Rose.

"She imbued me with a sense of confidence and well-being, nurturing me, praising me. She gave me a birthday card with little medals; she painted them."

It has been 54 years since her mother painted the birthday card, but Ms. Toll remembers.

"A medal for being pretty," Ms. Toll says, and as she says it, one realizes that she still is. "A medal for working hard, for being polite, for being kind. I wrote a play about all this a few years ago. Somebody said I made my mother to be too much of a saint, but that was how I knew her."

After the war, Ms. Toll's mother remarried and had another daughter. The family came to the United States in 1951. Today, Ms. Toll seems to inhabit the world she painted as a child: leaf-green, happy domesticity. Married, with two children and five grandchildren, Ms. Toll lives in a suburb of generous green lawns. She is an adjunct professor of creative writing. She also lectures on Holocaust art.

During her time in hiding, did she

sad picture?

"No."

A hazy line separates hope from the voguish state of denial.

When she experienced other difficulties in life, did she turn from them? How did she behave when her mother was dying of cancer, five years ago?

"I was realistic," Ms. Toll says. "I did say to her, which my sister didn't, 'You know it could reverse' or that 'there will be a new drug.' I would say this to her to the day she died. Once she started to talk to me about her funeral and I started crying. After this she never mentioned it to me again."

"I took my pictures once to an art therapist," Ms. Toll says. "She said the girl in the pictures was pretty connected, steady, adjusted. She is surrounded by friends; there is no sense of loneliness without others. There was a great deal of love behind these artworks."

Her wish to keep where she lives and works out of the papers?

"There are all kinds of neo-Nazis and crazy people out there," Ms. Toll says. "Why should they know where I live? Let them look for me."

for HBO next week, with SPIKE LEE directing.



NAM JUNE PAIK

3 Win Kyoto Prize

Assuming that the call went through in the middle of the night, the video artist

NAM JUNE PAIK is \$351,000 richer today. The Inamori Foundation, started in 1984 by the industrialist KAZUO INAMORI, chose him for one of three Kyoto Prizes and was scheduled to call him at his loft in SoHo by 2:30 A.M.

He probably had an inkling that the call was coming. After all, the foundation had summoned him to Kyoto, Japan, last month.

But the group, though eager for the publicity that comes with giving away big money, wanted to be the one

to give him the official word. So it sent out a press kit on the condition that he not be contacted until after the all-important call.

"If he doesn't pick up, they keep trying," said JENNIFER FRIEDMAN, a spokeswoman.

The two other winners, who were to have been called at the same time, were Dr. KURT WUTHRICH, a pioneer in molecular and structural biology, and Dr. KIYOSHI ITO, a mathematician and professor emeritus at Kyoto University.

A Dancer's Debut

MIKHAIL BARYSHNIKOV did something last night that he had never done before: He danced at a political event, a fund-raiser for PETER VALNONE, the City Council Speaker and a candidate for governor. "Peter Vallone has always worked hard for arts in New York City," Mr. Baryshnikov said, "and I'd like to see him continue this work for the state."

JAMES BARRON
with Phoebe Hoban